

IN THE HIGH COURT OF GUJARAT AT AHMEDABAD

SPECIAL CIVIL APPLICATION No 8703 of 1997

For Approval and Signature:

Hon'ble MR.JUSTICE H.R.SHELAT

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1. Whether Reporters of Local Papers may be allowed to see the judgements?
2. To be referred to the Reporter or not?
3. Whether Their Lordships wish to see the fair copy of the judgement?
4. Whether this case involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution of India, 1950 of any Order made thereunder?
5. Whether it is to be circulated to the Civil Judge?

DINESH SHIKARCHAND SHAH: Petitioner.

Versus

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE & Ors.: Respondents.

Appearance:

MR ANIL S DAVE for Petitioner

Mr. S.R. Divetia, APP for respondents.

CORAM : MR.JUSTICE H.R.SHELAT

Date of decision: 05/02/98

ORAL JUDGEMENT

The Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad, on 8th October 1997 passed the order of detention invoking the powers under Section 3 (2) of the Gujarat Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act, 1985 (for short 'the Act') and getting the petitioner arrested, detained him. The petitioner who is under detention challenges the legality and validity of the order preferring this application under Article 226 of the Constitution of India.

2. Before I proceed to dissect the merits of the

order, it is necessary to set out certain facts in brief. The Commissioner of Police for the city of Ahmedabad, either during the course of the inspection or the visits he used to make of the different police stations, came across the facts that the petitioner by continuously carrying out his different activities amounting to criminal wrongs was disturbing the public order and was a dangerous person. It was found that about 7 complaints were lodged in different police stations, namely Bapunagar police station, Amraiwadi police station and Naroda police station. About 6 complaints were of scooter theft and one of a cycle theft. The Police Commissioner took keen interest and after inquisition he could see that the petitioner was a head-strong person i.e. a tartar & decimator and by different criminal activities, he was terrorising the people. He was extorting money, causing injuries and/or causing damage to the properties. By diabolism, he used to cause the people to bend his way. His hellish and infernal activities disturbing public order were going berserk. No one was, therefore, ready to come forward and state against him. After a great persuasion and when assurance was given that the facts about them disclosing their identity would be kept secret, some of the witnesses have under great tension stated against the petitioner. After a detailed inquiry, the Police Commissioner found that to curb the anti-social, subversive and chaotic activities of the petitioner, unspeakable diabolism terrorising the society, and upsetting the public order and leading to anarchy, ordinary law was falling short and was sounding dull. The only way out to hold him in kittle was to detain him under the Act. He, therefore, passed the impugned order. Consequent upon the same, the petitioner came to be arrested and at present, he is in custody.

3. On behalf of the petitioner, challenging the impugned order, it is submitted that the order in question is passed after a great delay, as a result, the continuous detention has been rendered illegal. There was no justification for the authority passing the detention order withholding particulars. exercising the privilege under Sec.9(2) of the Act. The detaining authority ought to have disclosed the particulars of the witnesses whose statements were recorded in support of the order passed. No doubt, under Section 9 of the Act, the authority has the privilege, but that is to be exercised judiciously, and not arbitrarily or capriciously so as to deprive the detenu of his right to have effective representation. As the particulars were not given, the petitioner was deprived of his right to have the effective representation against the order. The

instances about the offences noted in the order were not sufficient to brand him a dangerous person or to form a reasonable belief that maintenance of public order was adversely affected. The statements recorded are vague and necessary particulars when wanting, the order is bad in law and is liable to be quashed.

4. Mr.Divetia, the learned AGP has vehemently refuted the allegations made, submitting that there is no delay on the part of the authority passing the order of detention, promptly order was passed and in the public interest, certain facts & particulars are withheld.

5. It would be better if the law about the non-disclosure of certain facts is elucidated. Reading Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India, what becomes clear is that the grounds on which order of detention is passed are required to be communicated to the detenu. The detenu is, therefore, required to be informed not merely factual inference and factual material which led to inference namely not to disclose certain facts but also the sources from which the factual material is gathered. The disclosure of sources can enable the detenu to draw the attention of the detaining authority in the course of his representation to the fact whether the factual material collected from such sources would be relied upon and used against him on the facts and circumstances of the case. Subject to the limitation mentioned in Article 22(6) of the Constitution of India and Section 9(2) of the Act, the detaining authority is of course empowered to withhold such facts and particulars, the disclosure of which he considers to be against the public interest. The privilege of non-disclosure has to be exercised sparingly and in those cases, where public interest dictating non-disclosure overrides the public interest requiring disclosure. Hence the detaining authority must be fully satisfied on the basis of overall study that the apprehension expressed by the informant is honest, genuine and reasonable in the circumstances of the case. With a view to satisfy itself whether the fear of violence and consequential feelings of insecurity or apprehension of a wrong would be done to them at any time by the detenu by those making statement against the detenu is imaginary or fanciful; or an empty excuse or well-founded for disclosing or not disclosing certain facts or particulars of those persons, the authority making the order has to make necessary inquiry applying his mind. What can be deduced from such constitutional as well as legal scheme whereunder obligation to furnish the grounds and the duty to consider whether the disclosure of any facts involved

therein is against public interest are both vested in the detaining authority and not in any other. The authority passing the order of detention has to apply his mind and should itself be satisfied to the question whether or not the supply of the relevant particulars and materials would be injurious to the public interest. If the task of recording statements and necessary inquiry is entrusted to others, and if he mechanically endorses or accepts the recommendation of others or subordinate authority in that behalf without applying mind and taking his own decision, the exercise of power would be vitiated as arbitrary. What is further required is that the detaining authority must file his affidavit to satisfy the court that he had sincerely and honestly applied the mind for the bonafide exercise of the powers about disclosure and privilege regarding non-disclosure so that the court can examine rational connection between the ground disclosed or not disclosed in public interest. If no affidavit explaining the exercise of the power is filed, the court can infer against the detaining authority. If the affidavit is filed explaining the exercise of the power, the detenu may challenge the privilege exercised on the ground that the same is vitiated by factual or legal malafides. For my such view, a reference to a decision in the case of Bai Amina, W/o. Ibrahim Abdul Rahim Alla Vs. State of Gujarat and others- 22 G.L.R. 1186 held to be the good law by the Full Bench of this Court in the case of Chandrakant N. Patel Vs. State of Gujrat & Others 35(1) [1994(1)] G.L.R. 761, may be made.

6. In view of such law, the authority passing the detention order has to satisfy the court that it was absolutely necessary in the public interest to keep certain particulars regarding the witnesses secret so as to protect their safety. It is pertinent to note that the authority passing the order has not filed the affidavit explaining the circumstances which led him to believe that the fear expressed by the witnesses was justified and proper and was not empty excuse and to protect their safety particulars disclosing their identity were required to be withheld. When no such explanatory affidavit is filed, it must be held that without any just cause the particulars are withheld and thereby the right of petitioner to represent his case is jeopardised. When that is so, the detention in question is unconstitutional and is required to be quashed.

7. For the aforesaid reasons, this petition is allowed. The order of detention passed on 8th October, 1997 by the Police Commissioner, Ahmedabad, is hereby

quashed and set aside, and the petitioner is ordered to be set at liberty forthwith if no longer required in any other case. Rule accordingly made absolute.

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